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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KMDR PREL KPAO OPRC SY

SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/Lebanon, Peace
Process, Syria/China, Syria/Australia, War on Terrorism (9/8-10)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers over the weekend led with reports of President Asad's phone conversations with Italian PM Prodi, which focused on technical assistance to be offered to Syrian border guards, and featured a statement by the Syrian News Agency denying reports that Syria has accepted European border guards to monitor the Lebanese-Syrian border.

Syrian papers also reported Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's visit to Damascus, his meetings with President Asad, VP Shara and FM Mouallem, and his press conference, in which he stated that his talks dealt with the situation in Lebanon and the Middle East peace process. Headlines featured Lavrov's statement at the press conference that the recent events in Lebanon have revealed the importance of achieving solutions to Middle East problems. He reiterated the importance of implementing UNSC resolution No. 1701 and rebuilding Lebanon and called for an international conference on Middle East peace. Headlines also featured FM Mouallem's statement that "Syria doesn't work through secret mediators" and that "everything Syria does is known and announced."

On Syrian-Chinese relations, papers reported the visit to Beijing by Mohammad Said Bkheitan, Regional Assistant Secretary of the Al-Ba'th Party, on an official visit to China for talks about Party cooperation, the Chinese economic experience, and the role of the Party in setting its general policies and supervising its implementation.

On Syrian-Australian relations, papers reported the visit to Australia by Syrian Expatriates Minister, Buthaina Shaaban, who delivered a lecture at Macquarie University in Sydney, entitled, "Syrian Strategy for Peace in the Middle East," in which she confirmed that Syria is working for the establishment of peace in the region on the basis of international resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad and Italian PM Prodi discuss in a phone call technical assistance to Syrian border guards. Syria denies agreement to deployment of European border guards along Syrian/Lebanese border" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/10)

"President Asad holds talks with Russian FM Lavrov. Lavrov talks in Damascus were successful and fruitful. Syria and Russia call for seizing the peace opportunity. Syria: Russia has an important role in maintaining security and stability. Conditions are appropriate to revive President Putin's peace initiative. Lavrov: We are eager to work with Syria to achieve a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Mouallem: Syria does not work via secret mediators; what Syria does is well-known and announced" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/8)

"Hizbollah rejects deployment of UNIFIL outside southern Lebanon and calls on the February 14th group not to bet on foreign parties" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 9/10)

"The Lebanese army denies illegitimate crossings into Syria" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/10)

"After meeting a Syrian popular delegation, former Lebanese PM Al-Hoss: Syria has always supported Lebanon and its resistance. Syrian MP Habash: We did not demand any meeting with the March 14 team" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/8)
"Israeli siege ends, and Israeli piracy continues. Six Lebanese abducted from Eita al-Shaab and Merwahin. Calls to reject receiving Blair in Lebanon. A debate over the aftermath of Israeli aggression" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/9)
"The General Secretariat of the Pan-Arab Conference hails the Resistance victory and calls for helping Lebanon and reactivating boycott of Israel" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/9)
"Bkheitan, Regional Assistant Secretary of the Ba'th Party, receives Palestinian intellectual Bishara: Syria exerts efforts to boost Palestinian national unity. Bkheitan heads to Beijing, presiding over an official Party delegation" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/10)

"Israel continues to impose preconditions and rejects an international peace conference. Abbas and Olmert will not discuss a prisoner swap" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/9)

"The Israeli army invades Khuzaa. Three Palestinians injured. HAMAS: No resignation under force" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 9/10)

"PM Blair defends policies identical to those of Bush administration, and calls for resumption of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/10)

"Japan completes withdrawal of troops from Iraq. Security enforcements in Karbala. Attacks and explosions in Baghdad, Karkuk and Beiji" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 9/10)

"On the eve 9/11 anniversary, US President Bush: The danger of terrorism still exists.... We will pursue terrorists without mercy" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/10)

"A US Senate report: Saddam Hussein had no relation with al-Qaeda" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/9)

"Democrats in US Senate reject vote to keep Bolton in his position, due to his inefficacy and negative role at the UN" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/8)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"From Hiroshima to Qana"

Isam Dari, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (9/9): "No doubt the destruction of the two towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon building was a terrorist act par excellence. But that act was carried out by a small group of people who represented no country or even a party. The US

Administration's response to the 9/11 attacks, on the other hand, has been the worst form of terrorism, because it is state terrorism practiced by the world's biggest and strongest country, a country that should have had the world's security and peace at the center of its attention and responsibility, not the contrary....

"It is strange for the Bush administration to claim that its wars against Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon are aimed at eliminating terrorism. This argument no longer fools even the Americans and the British who brought George Bush and Tony Blair to power. Here is Bush's popularity rating dropping to an all time low, and here is Blair announcing that he will leave office within a year.... We also should not forget that the war on Iraq brought down former conservative Spanish Prime Minister Aznar....

"Nothing is easier than making war, perpetrating massacres, and practicing terrorism, as is now happening in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Palestinian territories and as happened in Lebanon. But taking the road of peace is very difficult for these people, who know nothing but the language of killing, destruction, and terrorism, and who, over more than six decades, have committed mass killings from Hiroshima to Qana to Marwaheen to Siddiqin to Gaza to Janin. They are the same hands and the same killers, from Hiroshima to Qana."

"Lahd also Meets the March 14 Group"

Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishrin, commented (9/8): "The main job of the March 14 group in Lebanon is to level accusations against Syria, tarnish Syria's image, and spoil relations between the Syrian and Lebanese people. This is what Israel and the United States want this group to do....

"Syria is not surprised by the positions and statements of members of this Lebanese group because it really believes they are an Israeli product with an American stamp. Therefore, they can never be the true representatives of Lebanon. They utter nothing but what Israel and the United States dictate to them directly or through the brokers in the region who speak for the Israelis and the Americans....

"There is a statement by Antoine Lahd, commander of the former pro-Israel militia in south Lebanon, in which he revealed that he 'regularly meets in Europe with figures from the March 14 team....' There are also reports about meetings between Walid Junblatt and Israeli figures in Europe....

"What is important to the overwhelming majority of the Lebanese and to Syria is that these people are completely exposed in their relations, contacts, alliances, and attacks on Syria and the Lebanese nationalist line. They are exposed and unable to have a real effect on national Lebanese issues. They know themselves very well. History will have no mercy on them."

"First, Let Palestinians Unite"

Razan Imran, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (9/9): "Palestinians must renounce their differences and adopt a unified position.... This is the only way for them to force Israel to recognize their rights....

"It is regrettable that despite all the Israeli killings and the siege, Palestinians have not united their ranks.... Staging strikes in protest of food shortages is a perfectly legitimate action. But holding the Palestinian government fully responsible for the siege that Israel has imposed in collaboration with other countries that turn a blind eye to it,

is conduct that ignores facts....

"It is regrettable that some of the people of the 58-year-old Palestinian cause have not learned that their enemy understands nothing but force. This enemy redeployed in Gaza only by force. It withdrew from south Lebanon only by force. It rushed to a political rescue from the results of its aggression against Lebanon only under the pressure of unfamiliar military losses. All that was a result of force, not only military force, but also the force of a unified position...."

"What Do They Want from Sudan?"

Ahmad Hamadah, a columnist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (9/8): "The powers that pushed for the adoption of Resolution 1706 on Darfur do not want to give the Sudanese government the chance to implement its plan in that region. Rather, those forces wanted to create tension there to pave the way for the deployment of international forces and the implementation of their own agendas....

"It is no longer secret that the US and Western interest in Sudan is linked to the reported oil discoveries there and to Israel's effort to divide Sudan and reach the sources of the Nile...."

Corbin